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ABSTRACT

The Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative was established in 1986 to create 6 model workplace literacy education programs and later expanded, with state and federal funding, to more than 20 programs at over 40 worksites. The initiative was developed in response to the growing recognition of functional illiteracy in an increasingly complex workplace. The five goals of the initiative are to: (1) provide workers with the opportunity to develop basic reading, writing, and computational skills and earn credentials for upgrading their workforce positions; (2) to increase employer awareness of functional illiteracy and its costs; (3) to develop unions' understanding of the extent and implications of functional illiteracy among members and other workers; (4) to develop partnership models linking acquisition of basic skills with increased worker opportunities; and (5) to promote ties between education, training, and employment communities at state and local levels. The Initiative has tried to fund programs representing the full spectrum of needs within the state, in mature industries and the growing service sector, for union and non-union workers. Most early programs were English-as-a-Second-Language and literacy programs for non-native English-speakers, with programs for native speakers added in the second year. The 22 programs funded for fiscal year 1989 are described briefly. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Program Summary

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Sondra G. Stein
January 1989

The Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative
Program Summary

The Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative is part of Governor Michael Dukakis' comprehensive attack on adult illiteracy. Coordinated through the Commonwealth Literacy Campaign, the Workplace Education (WPE) Initiative is a joint program of the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Education, and the Executive Office of Labor. It has received a U.S. Department of Labor JTPA Presidential Award "in recognition of the Initiative's exemplary coordination of business, labor, education, employment and training to offer workplace literacy programs ... to working adults."

Created in 1986, the Initiative matched JTPA 8% and state Department of Education adult literacy money to fund six model workplace education programs in SDAs across the Commonwealth. Additional state funding, through the Executive Office of Labor, and federal workplace literacy funds from U.S. DOE have enabled us to expand the Initiative to more than 20 programs operating in approximately 40 worksites.

This Initiative was developed in response to a growing recognition of the extent and impact of functional illiteracy in an increasingly complex workplace. The dislocation of thousands of workers as a result of plant closings in older manufacturing industries provided one of the early indicators of the extent of illiteracy in the workplace. More than 40% of these dislocated workers lacked a high school diploma. Many lacked the basic skills necessary to qualify for reemployment at comparable wages.

It was clear that the changes in the Massachusetts economy that produced this dislocation would also effect the entire workforce. In fact, two-thirds of the employment growth in the last eight years has been in industries requiring workers with relatively high levels of educational attainment. Right now, eight out of ten of the fastest growing industries in Massachusetts are in services, and by 1995, nearly three-quarters of all jobs will have moved from material-based to knowledge based production. Over the past fifteen years, Massachusetts has already seen the job share for those without a high school diploma decline from 34% to 17%. This trend will continue. Current projections are that the median education level required by the new jobs will be 13.5 years.

In other words, most of the new jobs generated in Massachusetts over the next ten years will require substantially higher levels of education and training. The choice posed by this change in the labor market for the workers of the future will be either to develop strong literacy skills as a base for more advanced education and training or to live and work in dead-end jobs that offer no hope of moving out of poverty. Right now, thirty

percent of all adults living in poverty in Massachusetts are employed. The income of these individuals and their families remains below the poverty level, however, as a result of seasonal work, part time employment, and year-round, full-time work at low wages.

Immigrants and refugees make up a large percent of these working poor. Among the nearly 300,000 new arrivals in the past decade are many with a strong desire to work who lack sufficient English language skills to qualify for the more skilled, higher paying work that is prerequisite for economic self-sufficiency.

This Workplace Education Initiative provides a critical mechanism both for enabling individual workers to overcome the barrier of illiteracy and for enabling Massachusetts employers to improve their productivity and competitive edge in the world economy.

The five goals of the Workplace Education Program are:

1. to provide workers with the opportunity to develop basic reading, writing and computational skills and to earn the credentials, up to and including the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or a high school diploma, necessary to upgrade their positions in the workforce, and to increase their earning power; and

2. to increase employer awareness of the extent of functional illiteracy among workers and its costs in terms of low productivity, workplace accidents, absenteeism, low product quality, and lost management and supervisory time;

3. to develop understanding among unions of the extent of functional illiteracy among members and other working people and how inadequate reading, writing, and computational skills or lack of proficiency in English constitute serious social and economic barriers;

4. to develop a number of partnership models that link the acquisition of basic education skills with increased opportunities for workers, and that are appropriate for replication in a variety of community, union, and workplace settings;

5. to promote strong ties between the education, training, and employment communities, both at a statewide and local level, so as to increase the effectiveness of efforts to build the self-sufficiency of individuals and their families.

As these goals make clear, the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative is a research demonstration project as well as a service delivery initiative. When planning for this Initiative began in 1985, we discovered that while there were a large number of workplace education programs across the country, there was no systematic research effort focused on examining whether workplace education programs were, in fact, an

effective means for addressing the functional literacy needs of working adults. Since most programs were responses to the needs and interests of individuals employers or labor organizations, this paucity of research was not surprising: while individual companies might be interested in evaluating whether the programs they established met company goals, they would not, in general, be interested in the broader policy issues of whether workplace education represented an effective intervention strategy and, if so, under what conditions.

These were questions that deeply concerned the agencies establishing the state initiative. We wanted to test the validity of the assumption that adult literacy programs offered in the workplace can be effective in overcoming traditional barriers to participation and success in adult literacy programs. By establishing a number of different model programs, all developed in response to the same set of guidelines, and all coordinated under the aegis of a single, interagency initiative, an ideal set of conditions was created for studying workplace education in a wide range of settings and for determining what characteristics and components are essential for success.

In pursuit of this goal, the Initiative has tried to fund programs that represent the full spectrum of needs within our state. Programs have been funded in our mature industries as part of an overall strategy to modernize production and prevent plant closings and worker dislocation. Programs have also been funded in our growing service sector, with models developed in both unionized and non-unionized settings, and for workers in hospitals, nursing homes, and home care situations. Since most of our first year programs were ESL language and literacy programs for non-native English speakers, a number of programs focusing on native speakers were funded in our second year. In addition, in order to try to address the special problems faced by smaller employers trying to provide educational services for their workers, we have funded a number of program models involving consortia, business associations, and unions whose membership work in several companies.

The development of each of these models is being documented through an extensive formative evaluation that is an integral part of the Workplace Education Initiative. Carried out by an external evaluation team, the documentation enables us to track the strengths and weaknesses of each model, to troubleshoot problems as they occur, offering timely and appropriate technical assistance to programs on an on-going basis. The evaluation also provides us with the information we need to shape a longer term, more systematic replication and technical assistance strategy.

For more information contact Judy Hikes, Workplace Education coordinator (617-727-6573); or any one of the state partners: Bob Bickerton, Department of Education (617-770-7504); Martin Blatt, Executive Office of Labor (617-727-6573); Kim Hoa Granville, Department of Employment and Training (617-727-6230); or Sondra Stein, Commonwealth Literacy Campaign (617-727-5717).

Workplace Education Programs
Fiscal Year 1989

All of the Workplace Education Programs are currently funded through June 30, 1989.

- **University of Massachusetts Labor/Management Literacy Program** — Amherst
  Franklin/Hampshire Employment and Training Consortium

  This program, operated by the University of Massachusetts and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1776, features workplace-related curriculum and a system of peer language coaches. The project partners have designed and published a model workplace literacy curriculum to be distributed among other public sector institutions. A "family literacy" component will be added to the program this year.

- **Health Care Workplace Education** — Boston
  Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services

  A basic skills education program for healthcare workers offered by Roxbury Community College through a joint sponsorship between Boston City Hospital, University Hospital, and three unions: Service Employees International Union, Locals 285 and 1475; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1489; and the National Union of Hospital Workers, District 1199.

- **Workplace Education Program** — Boston
  Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services

  This program for healthcare workers offered by the South Cove Manor Nursing Home and the Chinese American Civic Association provides English-as-a-Second Language instruction for those with prior nursing training (in their native language) and preparation for the nursing licensing exam. Special characteristics of this program include use of bilingual aides, a "Prevocational English and Medical Terminology" class and strong counselling support.

- **Workplace Education** — Boston
  Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services

  The purpose of this program, sponsored by Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, AFL-CIO, is to provide English-as-a-Second Language instruction to union members in order to improve their language capabilities, and thus their ability to improve their career opportunities.

- **Laundry and Dry Cleaning International Union, Local 66 Workplace Literacy** — South Boston
  Employment Resources, Inc.

  Many of these union workers are recent immigrants and refugees in need of English-as-a-Second Language instruction both to handle safely the hazardous chemicals and physical agents they work with daily, and to qualify for more skilled, higher paying jobs.

- **Workplace Education for Nursing Home Employees** — Locations South and West of Boston
  Metro South/West Employment and Training Administration

  In a program conceived by the Massachusetts Long Term Care Foundation, nursing home employees are given paid time off to attend ESL classes to increase their efficiency and improve the quality of patient care. Major innovations of this project are the use of nursing home residents as trained volunteer tutors and plans for regional conferences to demonstrate how other nursing homes can replicate the program.

- **Adult Workplace Literacy** — Brockton
  Brockton Area Private Industry Council

  A cooperative effort between the Brockton Area Private Industry Council, the Adult Learning Center, Brockton Public Schools, Hit or Miss Distribution Center and International Ladies Garment Workers Union, this program offers a work-related curriculum to improve basic skills and English speaking abilities.

- **Workplace Education Program** — Erving and Greenfield
  Franklin/Hampshire Employment and Training Consortium

  Provides machine shop and paper mill employees with hugh school equivalency preparation to build workers' abilities in interpretation and communication of information, reasoning, and application of math concepts. Participating companies include Erving Paper Mill, Strathmore Paper Company, Greenfield Tap and Die, Besley Products Rodney Hunt Corporation and Wesco Electric. Involved unions are United Electrical Workers Union, Local 274 and the United Paperworkers International Union, Locals 594 and 1171.

- **Workplace Education** — Fall River Area Locations
  Bristol County Training Consortium

  A creative partnership model between the Labor Education Center at Southeastern Massachusetts University and the Needle Trades Action Project, a state initiative in which labor and management jointly work to strengthen the region's apparel industry. Curriculum and materials focus on work, union, related life-skills, language and literacy skills. A system using peer language coaches will be developed within the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union for employees of Louis Hand, W.E.B. Sportswear Cliftex Corporation and Santoro Corporation.

- **Workplace Education** — Holyoke
  Hampden County Employment and Training Consortium

  This program is jointly sponsored by Hampden Papers and its employee union, Graphic Communications International Union Local 48B. They see it as an important mechanism for filling existing openings with employees with strong literacy skills. Both adult basic education and English-as-a-Second Language classes will be offered by the International Language Institute of Massachusetts at the workplace.

o **Friction Materials Workplace Education** — Lawrence
Lawrence Department of Training and Development

A partnership between Friction Materials, Inc. and the Lawrence Public Schools Adult Learning Center, this program provides employees with adult basic and secondary education (through GED) as well as English-as-a-Second Language instruction. Workers will receive paid release time for five hours per week of classes -- calculated at regular wages during working hours, and time-and-a-half wages when their instruction is provided before or after their shift.

o **Filene's ESL** — Natick
Metro South/West Employment and Training Administration

A unique emphasis on increasing cultural and ethnic awareness is a major aspect of this English-as-a-Second Language program designed by the Filene's Natick Distribution Center, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Local 1445 and Massachusetts Bay Community College.

o **Workplace Literacy** — New Bedford Area Locations
Office for Job Partnerships

A cooperative program between two unions representing primarily Portuguese workers in the apparel and electronics industries (the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, Local 377C and the United Electrical Workers Union, Local 219) and the Labor Education Center at Southeastern Massachusetts University. Classes in ESL instruction are supplemented by peer tutoring from on-site trained language coaches, recruited from among the workforce at each location.

o **Manufacturing ESL** — North Andover
City of Lawrence Department of Training and Development

With the support of Communications Workers of America, Locals 1365 and 1366, AT&T Technologies provides ESL instruction for Hispanic, Vietnamese and Cambodian assembly and production workers to give them the language and basic literacy skills needed for career advancement.

o **Workplace Education** — Quincy
South Coastal Career Development Administration

This English-as-a-Second Language program is jointly sponsored by Pneumatic Scale Corporation, and Local 444 of the New England Board, R.W.D.S.U. AFL-CIO. Operated by Jewish Vocational Services the program is designed to provide limited English speaking employees with the skills necessary for job advancement, including the ability to understand technical terminology and read blueprints.

o **Workplace Literacy** — Springfield
Hampden County Employment and Training Consortium

Easco Hand Tools Company is modernizing its manufacturing process, and with the active cooperation of the AFL-CIO Local 22804, ESL and basic education instruction will enable workers to perform the tasks necessary in the new enterprise. The other program is at Mercy Hospital, where many on the entry and low level employees are studying for their high school equivalency exams.

- **Workplace Literacy Project** — Wakefield and Reading
  Employment Resources, Inc.

  Located at two sites, this partnership between Fraen Corporation's Reading facility and Spir-it's Wakefield facility provides employees with English-as-a-Second Language and job specific mathematics instruction. Workers will receive four hours a week of classroom instruction, strong support services, transportation for those attending classes outside the time of their regular shift, and the use of tutors for additional instructional support.

- **Vocational ESL Program** — Watertown
  Employment Resources, Inc.

  This on-site program at the United Electrical Controls Company operated by Middlesex County Employment and Training Program offers employees vocational ESL instruction to help them take advantage of internal promotional and income opportunities.

- **DECLIT: A Workforce Literacy Project** — Westminster
  Montachusett Regional Private Industry Council

  This "high-tech" workplace education program grows out of a partnership between Digital Equipment Corporation and Mount Wachusett Community College. Located at Digital's Westminster facility where participating workers will be given fully paid release time, this program will provide adult basic and secondary education (through GED) as well as English-as-a-Second Language instruction.

- **Workplace ESL** — Worcester
  Metro South/West Employment and Training Administration

  Developed jointly by the Newton Buying Corporation (T.J. Maxx) and the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, this program enables warehouse workers to acquire English language proficiency through a special job-related curriculum designed by Quinsigamond Community College. Union members are trained as peer language coaches to supplement classroom instruction and to provide support for the learning process.

- **Workplace ESL Collaborative** — Worcester
  City Manager's Office of Employment and Training

  A collaboration between three small machine/metal trade companies -- Madison Cable Corporation, Kennedy Dye Casting and Presmet Corporation -- and Quinsigamond Community College, this program builds on the program development experience gained through the WPE program at T.J. Maxx. Located at each of the three businesses' facilities (all within the city of Worcester), the program provides English-as-a-Second Language and job specific mathematics instruction, a component for training supervisors in "cross-cultural awareness," the use of tutors for supplementary instruction and language tutors.

- **Worcester City Employees Literacy Program** — Worcester
  City Manager's Office of Employment and Training

  Participants are targeted workers who are working in entry-level occupations experiencing high turnover. The program, supported by the city of Worcester and city employee unions, features and individually paced curriculum using adult oriented materials.